

"New for Old"

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 8 August 2003 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Mark 2:18-3:6
<u>Reading</u>	Mark 2:18-3:6
<u>Hymns</u>	228, 396, 179 from Mission Praise
<u>Songs</u>	191, 541, 619, 155 from Mission Praise 183 from The Source
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If you have had anything do with household insurance
 you will know that most policies have a new for old clause,
 where provided you pay the appropriate premium,
 if you damage something in the home,
 the insurance will pay for a new one to replace the old one.
 Sometimes the new version is inferior to the old
 and you sadly miss what had become a treasured possession.
 But most of the time you are secretly pleased that you had an
 excuse to replace a worn out item.

In our poor old world it is not only things that wear out.

We wear out.

We grow old and weary and
 as we age we can no longer do the things we used to do,
 no longer cope with the pressures we used to handle.

We see less,
 we hear less
 and we think more slowly.

But that is not all.

Ideas get jaded.
 Schemes run down.
 Organisations petrify.
 And systems grind to a halt
 through lack of maintenance
 or lack of inspiration.

Those of you who studied thermodynamics at college will know
 that all systems gradually fall towards their lower energy state,

unless there is an input of energy.

Everything in this world seems to obey this law,
though the theory of evolution runs counter to it.
Even the Universe itself seems to be running down.

From time immemorial,
man has tried to find an answer to the big questions of life:
Where did we come from?
Why are we here?
and Where are we going?
All manner of philosophies have been proposed over the centuries,
until today, postmodernism admits that there is no answer.
There is no big picture that answers all the conundrums and contradictions of life,
so we must live with the inconsistencies
and accept the mismatch.
So anything goes.

As a result,
tolerance is the new morality.
Unless you are tolerant of all other views and positions
you are branded a hypocrite.
Intolerance is the new sin.
Tolerance cannot tolerate *intolerance*.

In this new morality,
we are the sinners.

Religion in general
and Christianity in particular preaches and promotes intolerance;
or so we are told!

We are hypocrites, (they say)
not because we do not practice what we preach,
for Joe Public, by and large, is pathetically ignorant of what we preach,
but because we do not conform to the new morality.
And we are bigots
because we are intolerant.

In answer to these charges we have to admit that we *are* hypocrites,
because we frequently fail to live up to our own teachings.
But we should be able to freely admit that the Church is a society of sinners
not a gathering of goody-goodies.
And secondly,
we *should* be much more tolerant than we are,
because that is how Jesus behaved.

Which brings us nicely to a closer look at tonight's passage in Mark's Gospel,
where Jesus' new teaching of freedom and forgiveness
stands out like a shining light

against the dark and forbidding hypocrisy and bigotry of the
religious leaders of His day.

Jesus' unconventional teaching
and his following as an unofficial, untrained Rabbi
were already causing grave concern to the leaders of the people.

Jesus was popular.
The people loved him.
They found him approachable,
and compassionate,
He healed their sicknesses and infirmities.
And though he was scathing in his condemnation of unrighteousness and evil,
he was forgiving
and loving.

An encounter with Jesus left you feeling ashamed of your failings,
but with a deep sense of cleansing
and a longing to be pure.

But the Pharisees were deeply suspicious.

He didn't conform to their kind of Judaism.
They fasted twice a week as their law required.
So did the disciples of John the Baptist.

But Jesus?
No!
He and his disciples didn't bother with such things.

If Jesus was genuinely spiritual,
he would have done these things!!
That was their thinking.

However, if we go back to their Bible,
the one they had available to them at that time,
what we now call the Old Testament,
we can see what they should have known.

In the Levitical law
as laid down in the books of Moses,
fasting was only commanded once a year at the feast of atonement,
when the priest made atonement for the sins of all the people.

Beyond that,
fasting was occasional and voluntary
and used as a means of coming closer to God in prayer and supplication
or as a sign and symbol of repentance.
But by Jesus' time fasting had become ritualistic
and obsequious.

It was a religious addition to what God required.
The hypocritically pious Jews fasted on Mondays and Thursdays,
and disfigured their faces in public
so that people could observe their piety.

And Jesus hated it.

“When you fast” he says in **Matthew 6:16**, “don’t put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men that they are fasting. But when you fast, wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is unseen. And your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Jesus doesn’t condemn fasting,
rather he accepts it as a legitimate expression of humility and piety,
but in secret –
between the disciple and his God.

Clearly Jesus is making a statement by not fasting when others are.
And people are quick to notice.

Jesus answer is both disarmingly simple
and deeply profound.

No-one fasts at a wedding do they?
A wedding is a time for rejoicing and feasting.
Maybe when it is over you may fast,
perhaps in repentance at your excesses.

But is there more here?
Is he implying that He is the Bridegroom?
And what does he mean when he says “.... the time will come when
the bridegroom is taken away”?
Allon Taffs used to implore us to listen to what Jesus says.
Michael MacCormack often says that when you preach,
make every word count.
Jesus certainly did that.

As Scripture will gradually unfold,
Christ is the Bridegroom
and the Church (His people) is His Bride.
It is the heavenly marriage of which all other marriages are but imperfect examples.
And there will come a time when Jesus is parted from his people,
for he will die on the cross as a selfless act of devotion
in order to secure the release of his Bride
from the tyranny of sin
and of Satan.

Then, while he is away
and the Bride is left behind to bear witness to his love
then will be the time for sorrow,
submission
and supplication,
all of which may be supplemented with fasting.

But Jesus continues:
“No-one sews a patch of new cloth on an old garment,

But we must press on.

It was the Sabbath.

The law said that no-one should work on the Sabbath.

We all know that Jesus' disciples were not well educated men

and hence may well not have known that in principle to pick corn,

rub it between their hands

and pick out the grain

was work.

Eating it wasn't work,

but threshing it in their hands was.

In this, therefore

they had broken the ceremonial law of the Sabbath,

and Jesus, if he was any kind of Rabbi at all

should have known that and told them off.

But Jesus takes them on,

first at a superficial level

and then at a deeper level.

He reminds them that even David

whom they regarded very highly as being one of the religious giants of their heritage

ate the consecrated bread

and fed his men when they were hungry.

Now that was forbidden.

Only the priests were allowed to eat that bread.

If you want to read the story,

you will find it in David's early history in [1 Samuel 21:1-6](#).

But again he goes further.

"The Sabbath was made for man." ([Mark 2:27](#))

In the beginning, God created the heaven and earth and everything in it in six days and on the seventh day he rested. ([Genesis 1:1-2:3](#))

So when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments,

he commanded the people, in the 4th commandment,

to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. [Exodus 20:8](#).

It was given as a day of rest and holiness.

It was supposed to be a blessing.

A day of freedom,

a day of liberty,

peace

and Godliness;

but again,

the Jews had made it a burden,

with petty laws and restrictions.

A day of misery and compulsion.

Again Jesus eschews their legalism,

proclaiming that the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.
 The Sabbath was God's institution
 and Jesus claims it back as his own.

Which takes us straight into chapter 3
 where we find Jesus once again under scrutiny on a Sabbath day.

 As was the custom for all law abiding Jews,
 Jesus goes to the synagogue.
 You must never forget that Jesus was a Jew.
 He kept the Jewish law.
 He did all the things good Jews do.
 But he did it to God's standards
 and not to the standards of men.
 And that is what he expects of us.

He doesn't expect to try to be what we are not.
 He wants us to be ourselves.
 Totally fulfilled as ordinary human beings; Scots,
 Anglo-Saxons
 Welsh
 or whatever we may be,
 but to live to God's ways
 and not conform to the wickedness of men.
 To act justly,
 to love mercy
 and walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Now in the Synagogue that day
 was a man with a withered hand.
 Whether he was a plant or not we don't know,
 but everyone was waiting to see what would happen.
 Would Jesus rise to the bait and heal on the Sabbath?
 The Jews believed that healing was work.
 But as Jesus pointed out,
 they would all untie their donkeys and feed them
 even on the Sabbath.

Again Jesus will not accept their hypocrisy.

So he throws out the challenge!
 On the Sabbath,
 do you do good or evil.
 Do you save life,
 or kill?
 No-one answers.

Jesus is very angry,
 because it is clear that to them all that matters is that their laws are kept.
 In their age, as in ours, morality has been reinterpreted

and what God intended has been abandoned in favour of man-made ideas.

But Jesus, ever in control, says to the man "Stretch out your hand".
And immediately it is healed.

And the Pharisees leave
to plot with the Herodians (a pro-Roman political party)
how to kill Jesus.

What then is our response to the new wine of the kingdom of God.

Our society believes that they have found a new religion of tolerance
and that what we peddle is an old morality
which is full of bigotry and hatred.

But that is not true.

That is a caricature of the message that Jesus brought to mankind.
And because that message is true -
Because it comes from the Living God who created all things,
that message is as relevant and fresh today as it was then
and it is still able to bring forgiveness,
freedom
and faith
to any are who are willing to listen to what Jesus actually said
rather than imagine that Christianity is an outmoded delusion
responsible for all the ills in our world.

What are we going to do with this message?

What we have is a unique message of faith and hope for a lost world
and we must not be defeated.

But we must dispel the image that we are bigoted and intolerant.
We must like Jesus open our arms wider in compassion to those who need a Saviour.
We must eschew the bigotry and pride
that have tarnished the Christian Church for centuries.

And our lives must display humility
mercy
and justice,
which characterise all that God does.

We have a fresh message for a tired world.
A message of hope
which offers new lives for old.

Let us not only accept it ourselves
but go and tell it on the mountains
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen

Paul Rydon
03 August 2003